Ruthless Halep DISMANTLES Serena Williams to claim her first Wimbledon crown while denying American a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam (But Serena still pockets more than £1million for losing!)

- **Simona Halep triumphed 6-2, 6-2 in 56 minutes here, becoming the first Romanian to win Wimbledon**
- **Saturday's victory saw the 27-year-old take her second Grand Slam title, while Williams will remain on 23**
- **The Romanian could not be stopped in the first set as she took it 6-2 in 26 minutes to stun Centre Court**
- **Williams was looking to equal Margaret Court's record but she was never allowed a foothold in this final**

By OLIVER HOLT FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

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Serena Williams fell to a tennis player in inspired form on Saturday. She fell to pregnancy's interruption of her career. She fell to the pulmonary embolism that followed the birth of her daughter, Alexis Olympia in 2017. She fell to a burst C-section and six days of complications that could have killed her. She fell to the injuries that assailed her recovering body this season. She fell to life and to age and to the march of time.

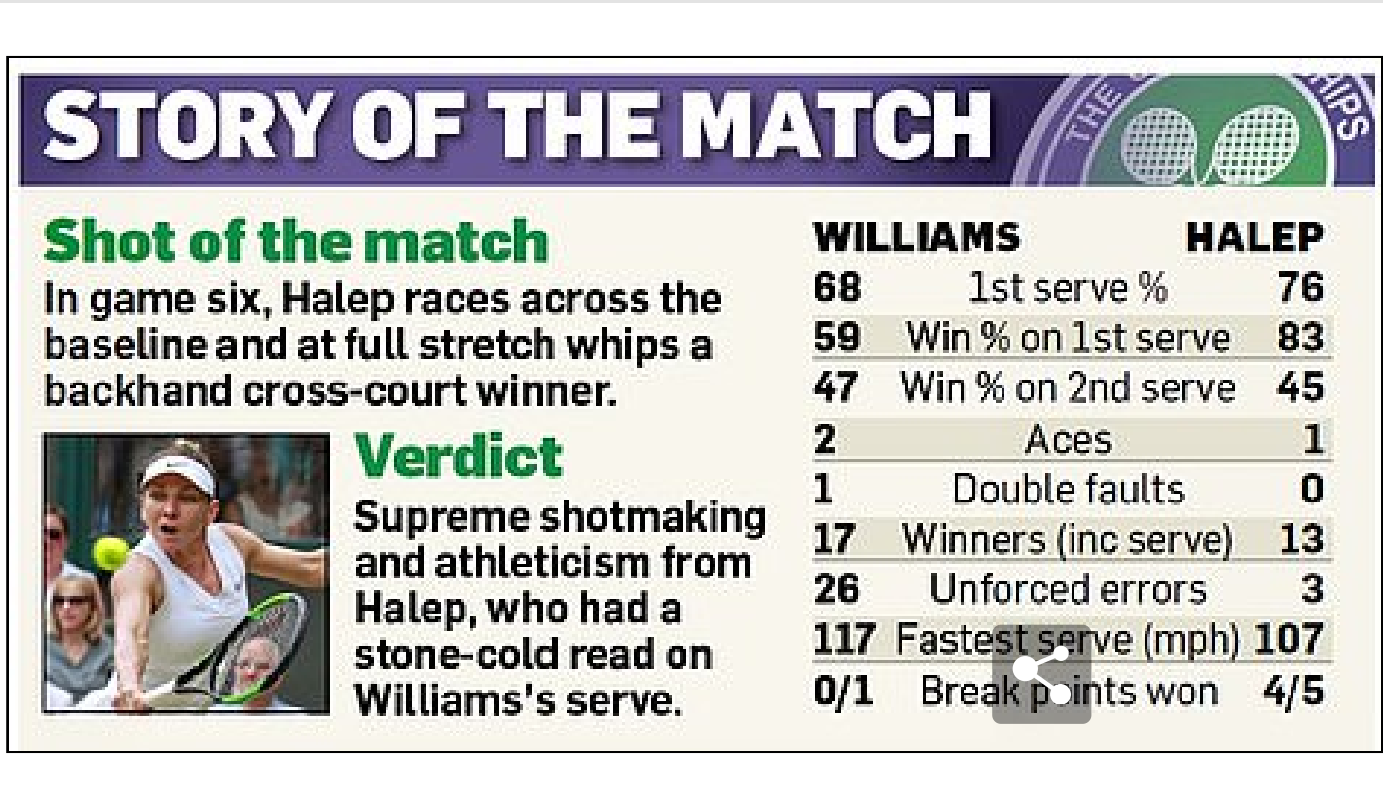
With history so tantalisingly close, with Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles one win away, Williams was overwhelmed 6-2, 6-2 in 56 minutes by Simona Halep on Centre Court. As she laboured and withered in the face of the underdog's onslaught, it felt as though her shot at the record was slipping away. She will be 38 in September. It is not going to get any easier.

Perhaps the record represents one step too far for a woman who has endured what she has had to endure. This was the third time in the last five major tournaments that she has lost in straight sets and the sight of her being so comprehensively outplayed does not get any less hard to compute. It was as if her 37-year-old body was telling her it had reached its limit.

Simona Halep won her first Wimbledon title after she eased past Serena Williams 6-2, 6-2 on centre court on Saturday

Halep was in disbelief as she won only her second ever Grand Slam title having previously won the French Open in 2018

The Romania tennis star eased past the American in 56 minutes to deny Williams a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam



STORY OF THE MATCH

Shot of the match
In game six, Halep races across the baseline and at full stretch whips a backhand cross-court winner.

Verdict
Supreme shotmaking and athleticism from Halep, who had a stone-cold read on Williams's serve.

WILLIAMS		HALEP
68	1st serve %	76
59	Win % on 1st serve	83
47	Win % on 2nd serve	45
2	Aces	1
1	Double faults	0
17	Winners (inc serve)	13
26	Unforced errors	3
117	Fastest serve (mph)	107
0/1	Break points won	4/5

Halep was quicker than her and more resilient and more consistent. She is 27 and she made that decade of difference in age count. She made Williams look old. She made her look immobile. She made her look uncertain. She made her look like someone who is fast running out of opportunities to nail that last title that she desires so much.

Williams has lost to Angelique Kerber, Naomi Osaka and Halep – in the last three Slam finals she has played. Maybe she has reached the stage there will always be someone who is just too good. It happens in sport. If it were not Serena, if this were not the greatest female athlete of all time we were talking about, the temptation would be to wave her goodbye.

Sometimes, it almost felt as if she knew. She only showed occasional flashes of defiance. In the first game of the second set, she lunged to her right to reach an attempt at a cross-court pass from Halep and volleyed the ball into open court to win the point. As the ball died on the turf, Williams screamed at the ground, her body shaking with rage and determination, exhorting herself to do better.

She could not sustain the rage, though. She could not harness it. In the end, it was her parting shot at the post-match press conference that provided most solace for those who continue to believe her moment has not passed and that she has one last Tiger-Woods-at-Augusta triumph left in her.

She went through the motions a little with her answers until a female journalist asked her whether she might be better served concentrating wholly on her tennis for a year rather than fighting for equality. Williams' eyes blazed. 'The day I stop fighting for equality and for people that look like you and me,' she shot back, 'will be the day I'm in my grave.'

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That defiance was the best indication that she will be back for more, contending again at the US Open next month. When she was asked if she thought winning a Slam would get harder with the passage of time, she was non-committal. 'I never thought about time,' she said.

Another part of the obstacle she faces now is that the younger players are no longer intimidated by her in the same way that the younger men's players still seem to be in awe of Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafa Nadal. Those who would be the heiress to her dominance see vulnerability in her now where once they saw none.

Halep ripped into her from the start. She was 4-0 up inside 12 minutes. It was evident even from the second point of the match, when Halep whipped a cross-court forehand past Williams at the net and made it look very easy, that this was not going to be the cakewalk for the seven-times champion many had expected. Halep played beautifully but Williams contributed to her own downfall with a slew of unforced errors.

Williams had beaten Halep nine times out of the 10 they had previously met. It was supposed to be over before they stepped on to the court. But when Williams overhit a backhand wildly to give Halep a break point for 3-0 and Halep sealed it with a brilliant winner, change was in the air.

Williams seemed to be finding her range at last when she reduced the deficit to 4-1 but Halep kept her nerve. In the last game of the set, a voice called out from the crowd. 'Wake up, Serena,' it yelled.

+6

Williams was looking to equal Margaret Court but she was never allowed a foothold in this final as Halep was dominant

+6

Halep appeared ready from the off and was in scintillating form as she raced to victory inside an hour at SW19

Simona Halep reigns supreme at Wimbledon in highlights package

Williams said later she had heard the plea. But she could not respond. She hit a forehand return wide to give Halep the first set. When Williams won the first game of the second set and screamed that scream of rage at the ground, it conjured ideas of a comeback. Halep would not permit it.

At 2-2, Halep chased down a Williams smash, got it back in court and won the point. Williams had an easy chance to save the first of two break points when a Halep retrieve sat up for her at the net. She hit it deep beyond the baseline.

Soon, it became obvious there was to be no comeback. At 4-2 down, Williams served a wild double fault. Halep broke again with a beautiful backhand winner down the line. If she had any nerves as she served for the title, she did not let on.

She won the game to love. Williams was grace personified in defeat. 'She played out of her mind,' she said of her opponent. 'It was a bit deer in the headlights for me.'

On the other side of the world, at the Victory Life Centre on the outskirts of Perth, Western Australia, Pastor Margaret Court and her flock were celebrating an anniversary of the church she founded in the mid-1990s. You've probably guessed by now how many years it's been. That's right: 24.

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Britain's Duchess of Cambridge (L) and Britain's Duchess of Sussex (R) were both in attendance on Saturday

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